

RÓBERT LÁSZLÓ HOLNDONNER:
THE FOREIGN POLICY DOCTRINES OF THE UNITED STATES FROM
MONROE TO BUSH
Abstract

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The subject of the thesis:

The thesis enumerates and descriptively analyses the foreign policy doctrines of the United States along a consistent set of criteria. One of the most problematic issue of my thesis was to define the mere subject itself – that is, to decide which manifestations and guidelines of American foreign policy should be dealt with and which ones should not be, since the concept “foreign policy doctrine” is not fixed explicitly (or, at least, not universally acknowledged and followed): there are uncertainties, for instance, concerning its relation to quasi-synonymous concepts, like foreign policy strategy, foreign policy program, foreign policy tradition, foreign policy ideology; their “pantheon” is not universally accepted, either – the inclusion or non-inclusion is exposed to contingencies. Therefore, knowing that all, I deal with the doctrines which are traditionally designated as such by diplomatic history – even if some of them, on the one hand, do not square with the strictest definitions, or others, on the other hand, are omitted despite the fact that they are epoch-making messages, acts, decisions, leadership styles of milestone relevance. All in all, the following doctrines can be found in my research: the Monroe Doctrine with the Roosevelt Corollary, the Policy of Open Door, the Stimson (or Hoover–Stimson) Doctrine, the Truman Doctrine, the Eisenhower Doctrine, the First Johnson Doctrine (concerning Southeast Asia), the Second Johnson Doctrine (concerning Latin America – also known as Kennedy–Johnson Doctrine), the Nixon Doctrine, the Carter Doctrine, the Reagan Doctrine, the Clinton Doctrine, and the Bush Doctrine.

The approach:

The thesis, quite naturally deriving from the character of the subject, is mainly descriptive, but it also aims at pointing out the inherent connections and principles – that is, analysis and explanation – and clashing opposing interpretations – that is, synthesis. Besides expounding the standpoints of the most relevant authorities of the historiography of the field, it also aims at publishing my own, original observations, where they are relevant. In my work, I predominantly cite other descriptions and analyses, but I have consciously aimed at consulting primary sources as well – like the texts of the doctrines, in each case, and relevant memoirs, in most cases.

The relevance of the work:

Reading the title of the thesis and the enumeration of the doctrines might suggest that the subject of the thesis is very – or rather: too – broad. And it is true if we only consider that, while describing and analysing the doctrines, all the important landmarks of the more or less 200-year-long history of the United States are touched in one way or another: from this perspective, one might think that this subject can only result in a shallow work; however, that is not the case. Since, I have to emphasize, the more or less 200-year-long course of American foreign policy is researched through the focus of the doctrines – that is, I only elaborate on the events and phenomena that are relevant in relation to the understanding of the doctrines (I focus on the doctrines themselves, and not the events or the American foreign policy of the given era in general). And, as far as I know, there has not been published a scientific material in Hungarian that describes and analyses all the doctrines of American foreign policy – all of them, in a consistent manner and in comparable length and depth.

The structure of the thesis:

The backbone and the main part (“size-wise”) of the thesis is the description of the given foreign policy doctrines. Each doctrine is described along the following criteria: basic content, international and domestic context, authorship, form of issuance, actual manifestations of the implementation, ideological precursors and doctrinal after-effects, diplomatic and political evaluation, validity, relation to other doctrines. Before that, in the beginning, I give a theoretical introduction, in which I deal with questions of definition (formulating a definition and telling apart related terms), I position the doctrines in the system of American foreign policy institutions (constitutional status, practical importance, relation to military doctrines), and I take a comparative look at the international scene (foreign policy doctrines as tools of other powers’ diplomacy). And after that, in the end, I make a comparative summary and draw some conclusions: I define the general characteristic features of the doctrines, and I categorize them according to some of their relevant attributes. (A prospective continuation of my study can be the case study-like research of the Bush Doctrine – this piece of academic effort has excluded such an effort, due to the limits of the genre and the limits of volume.)

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